

POCKET



The Story of My Life

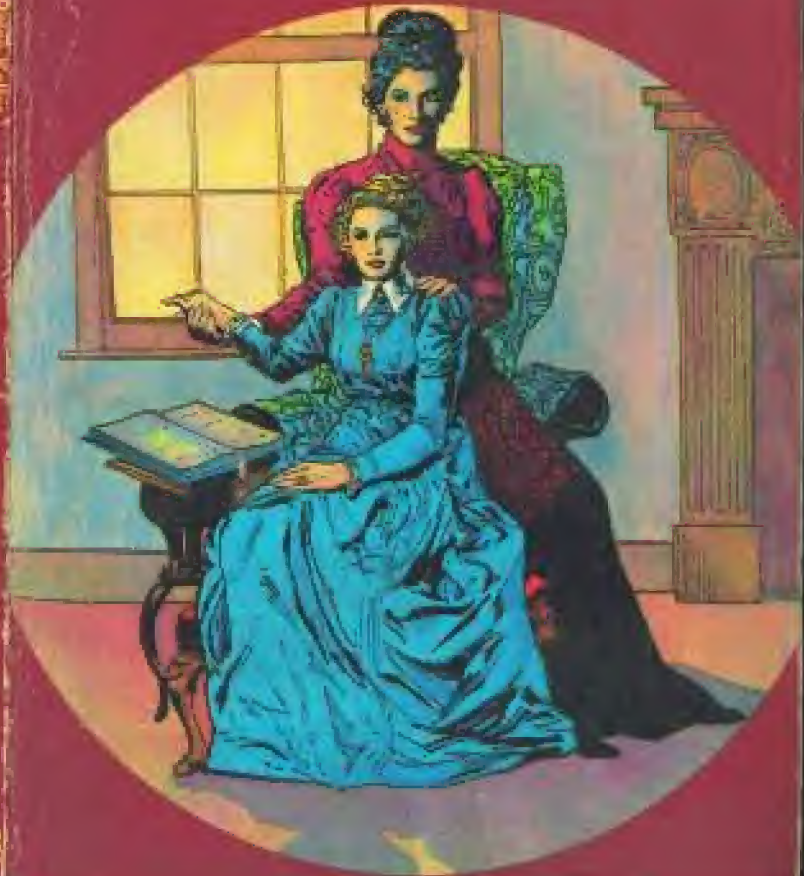
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HELEN KELLER

The Story of My Life



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The Story of My Life

Helen Keller



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Keller was born in Tuscomb, Alabama in June of 1880. At the age of nineteen months she lost her sight and hearing due to a tragic illness. When Helen was six years old her parents hired Miss Anne Sullivan (later Mrs. John Macy) to be her teacher. Miss Sullivan, partially blind herself, was a graduate of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts.

After being with her teacher for just a month, Helen acquired the gift of language. Through the combined efforts of Miss Sullivan, the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston, and the Wright-Humason Oral School in New York, Miss Keller learned how to read, write, and talk. She was an excellent student all through her school years and graduated *cum laude* from Radcliffe College in 1904.

The life of Helen Keller is most extraordinary and shows how she prevailed against almost insuperable odds. In 1902, Miss Keller wrote *The Story of My Life* in which she describes the results of modern methods for educating handicapped people.

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Helen Keller

The Story of My Life

This is a true story of a blind and deaf girl who learned to speak her thoughts and became famous throughout the world. But first there was the long struggle to break through the darkness and silence that surrounded her.



I was born in 1880 in a little town in northern Alabama.



I was the first baby in the family and was made much of.



When I was six months old. . .



I learned other words, too. . . .



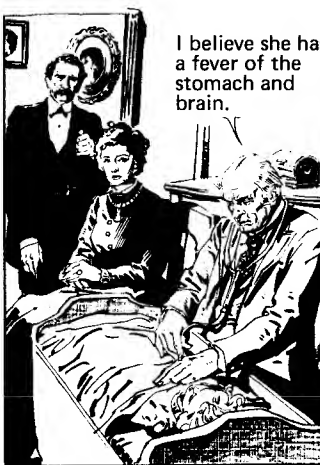
I walked the day I was a year old.



That summer and fall I was a happy child.



Then, in February, came a strange illness.



I must tell you . . . I do not think she can live.



Suddenly, one morning. . .

**Her fever is gone!
Her temperature is
back to normal!**

No one knew yet that I would never see or hear again.

*But that illness left me surrounded
by darkness and silence.*

The worst is over! She'll be better in no time!

**Thank
God!**

Can't see. . .
can't hear. . . .

For the first few months I stayed close to my mother.

Poor baby. . . .

I learned to know her motions.

My hands felt everything.

I learned to do many things. I could fold and put away clothes. . . .

I began to make signs. A nod for "Yes"....



A shake of the head for "No"....



A pull meant "Come"....



A push meant "Go"....



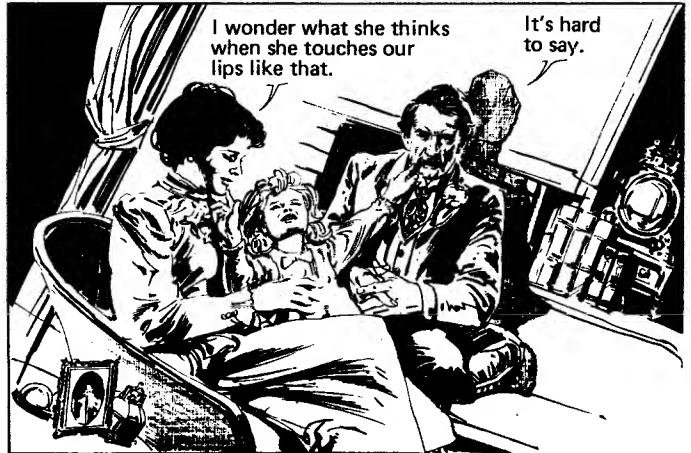
I learned other signs, too....



I understood many things. I knew from my mother's clothes when she was going out.



Then I noticed that other people did not make signs. They talked with their mouths. I touched their lips....



I moved my lips and wildly waved my arms—with no results.



What on earth is she trying to do?

Angry, I kicked and screamed until I was so tired I couldn't move.



A-a-a-a-gh!

As I grew older, I burst out more and more often.



Eeeeeee!

Not that I was always angry. I spent many happy hours helping our cook in the kitchen.



Her daughter Martha was my friend. She understood my signs.

Helen wants to play outside, Mama.

Run along, then. Mind you two behave!



We were full of trouble. Once we carried off a whole cake. . . .



Mmmm. . . .

Afterwards. . . .



I. . . I don't feel so good. You don't look so good either.

Another time, we were cutting paper dolls. . . .





My mother saved my curls.



When my sister Mildred was born, I was no longer my mother's only darling. I was very unhappy!



One day I found Mildred in my doll's cradle.



Again my mother came to the rescue.



Meanwhile, my temper tantrums continued. . . .



They lasted longer, too.

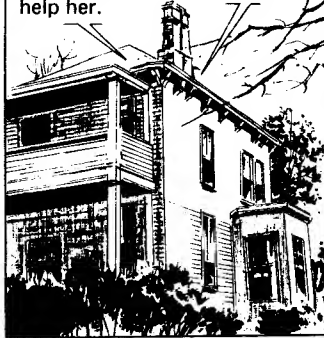


Then I would cry and throw myself into my mother's arms.



Poor child!

We must do something to help her.



Yes—but what?

About this time I found out how to use a key.



One day I locked my mother up in the closet.



Let me out, please!

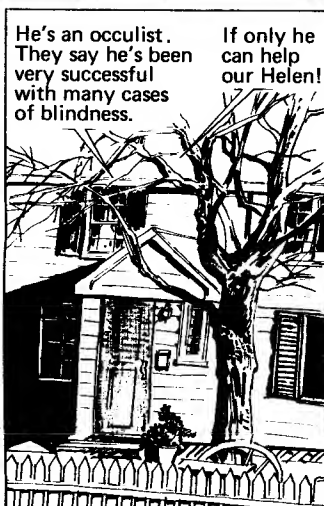
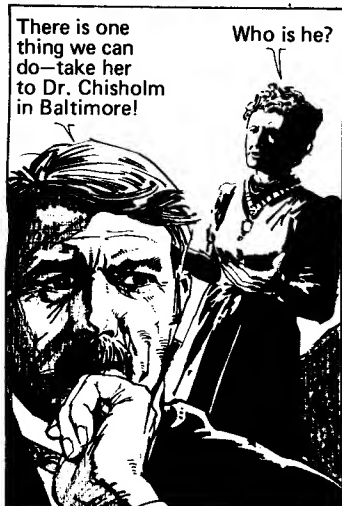


No one else was about, and it was three hours before she was let out.



Who locked you in?

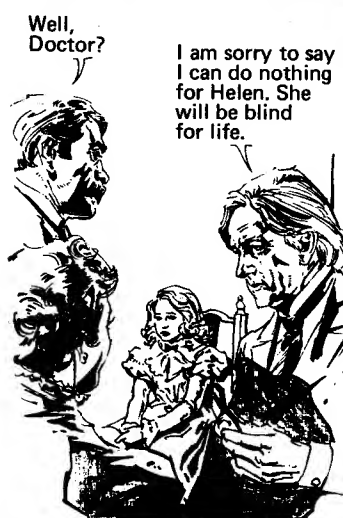
It was Helen!



And so we took the train to Baltimore. . . .

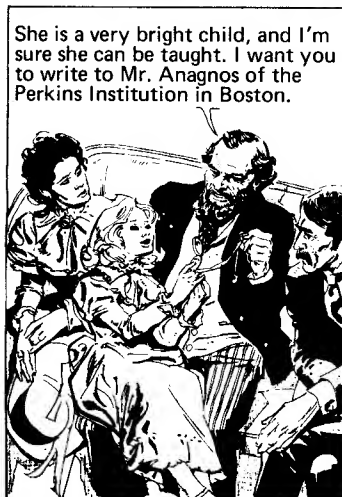


. . . .where Dr. Chisholm examined me.





But when we talked with Dr. Bell. . .



We returned home, and in a few weeks. . .



The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher came to me. I guessed from the excitement in the house that something important was about to happen.



I went outside and waited. . . .



I felt footsteps coming towards me. Thinking it was my mother, I held out my hand.



Someone took it. . . .



I was caught up and held close in the arms of the person who had come to show all things to me.



Next morning, my teacher led me into her room. . . .



And she gave me a new doll.



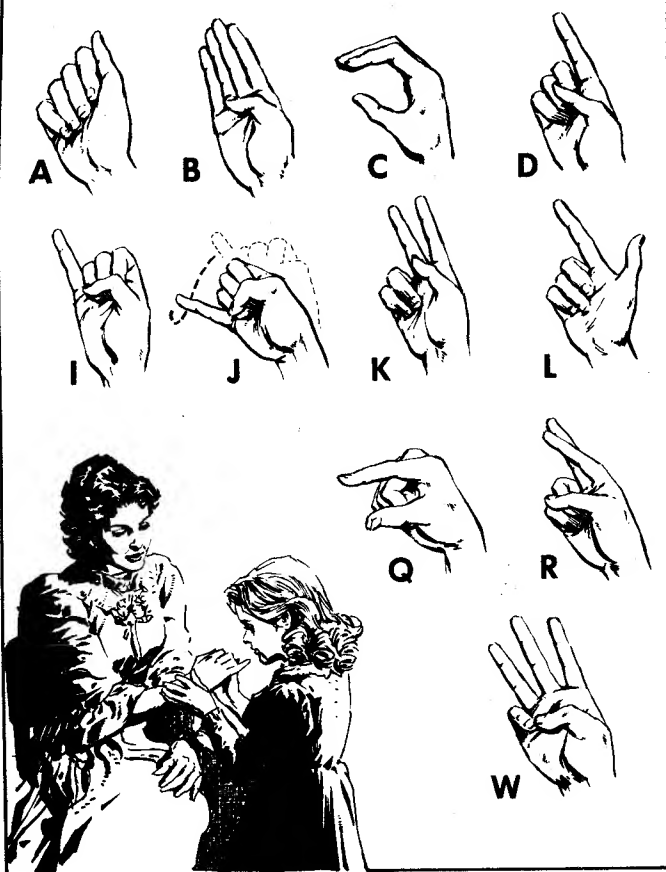
I played with it for a while.



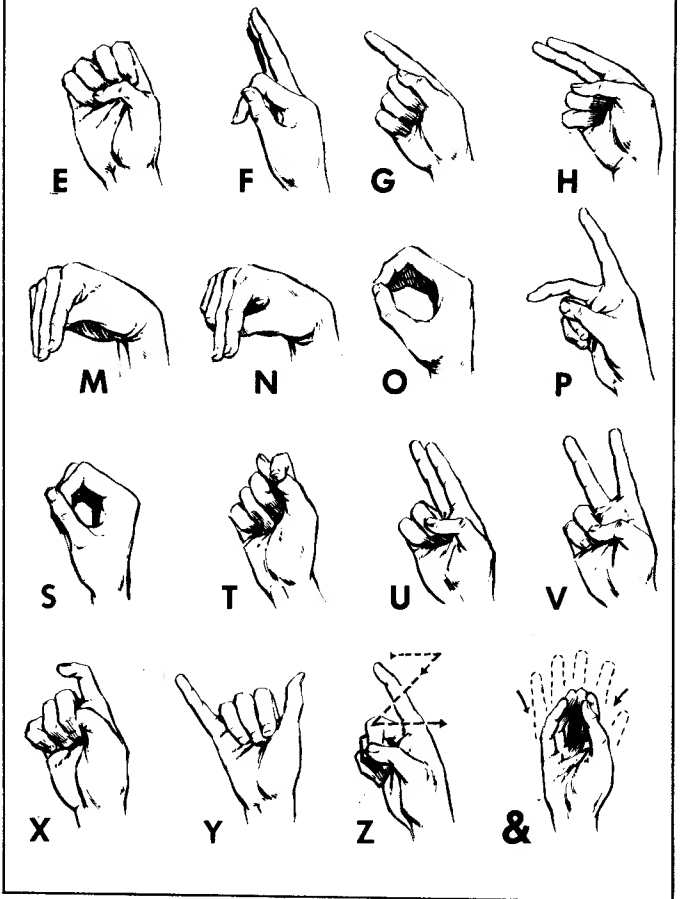
Then she spelled into my hand the word "doll."



This is the alphabet of finger signs with which Miss Sullivan taught me words. It is the finger alphabet used by deaf mutes.



But, instead of seeing the signs with my eyes, I had to learn them by touch.



I tried to do the same thing she did.



I finally was able to do it.



I ran downstairs to my mother and showed her the letters for "doll."



So began my education, which helped me to break through the darkness and silence.

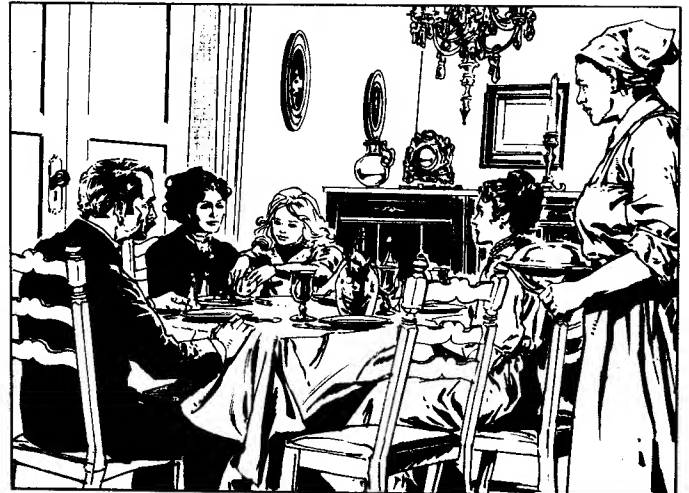


PART II—AS WRITTEN BY ANNE SULLIVAN

To the Reader:
Up to now, you have been reading the story of Helen Keller's life, as she herself wrote it. To show how she was taught, Part II is taken from letters and reports of her great teacher, Anne Sullivan.



Shortly after I came to the Kellers, at breakfast. . . .



As usual, Helen grabbed whatever she wanted. But I would not let her put her hand in my plate.



I had to fight with her.



I sat down and went on eating.



Helen threw herself on the floor.



After her parents left, I locked the door.



This went on for a half hour, until. . .



She began pinching me, and. . .



At last she began to eat, but with her hands.



I slapped her every time she did.



So I gave her a spoon, but she threw it on the floor.



Then I forced her to use the spoon.



After a while, she finished her breakfast peaceably.



We had many more battles. Over combing her hair. . .



Over washing her hands. . .





And so Helen and I moved into the little house.



That night we had a terrific tussle. It took two hours to get Helen to bed.



But after two weeks had passed. . . .



A few days later, Helen and I
returned to the Keller home.



Helen quickly felt there was
something new in the room. She
felt about until. . . .



And so I went on teaching
Helen, and by the end of the
month she had learned to knit
and knew twenty-one words.



PART III—AS WRITTEN BY HELEN KELLER

To the Reader:
In Part III we return to the words of
Helen Keller, telling the story of her
own life.

I now knew
a number of
words, but I
kept mixing
up the
words for
"mug"
and
"water."



So far, the spelling Miss
Sullivan had taught me
was just another game. I
did not know that a word
was a name for something,
that it had a meaning. . . .



One day we had a tussle over
those two words.



Miss Sullivan gave me my new
doll to change the subject.



For a while, she let me play.



Then she again tried to show me
the difference between the two
words.



I became so angry.



I picked up the doll, and. . .



Quietly she swept up the pieces.



She put on my hat, and I knew we were going out.



She spelled the word "water" into my other hand, and. . .



. . . suddenly I knew what "water" meant.



Outside, we walked down the path to the well-house.



She put my hand under the spout.



It was as if I had seen a great light.



At last I understood the mystery of language! Everything had a name!



I wanted to know the name of everything about me.



Returning to the house, I remembered the doll I had broken.



I tried to put the pieces together.



For the first time, I felt sorry for something I had done.



But I soon forgot my sorrow in the joy of learning new words.



Helen has learned thirty new words today and understands their meanings.



As I went to bed that night, I knew this had been one of the happiest days in my life.



That summer I learned the name of everything I touched, and Miss Sullivan taught me the beauty of nature.



I explored everything. . . .



One hot day I climbed a tree.



It was cool and pleasant there.



Miss Sullivan told me to stay there while she went to the house and got lunch.



After she had gone, a strong wind came up.



The tree swayed.



I was very frightened.



How glad I was when Miss Sullivan returned!



The next step in my education was learning to read. My teacher gave me cards with raised letters.



I "read" by touching the letters with my finger.



I had learned that nature wasn't always gentle.



I learned that each word stood for something.



I played games. . . .



...with both objects and words.



Soon...



...I was reading books with raised letters.



Then, with a writing board used by the blind, I learned to write.



Miss Sullivan taught me to make square letters.



When I had written my first sentence...





I learned history from trips to places like Plymouth Rock. . . .



. . . and Bunker Hill. . . .

The only study I did not like was arithmetic.



On a trip to Cape Cod, I learned to know the ocean.

I would run off to play as soon as I could.



I asked, "Who put salt in the water?"



On other trips to New England, I learned to know the snow and the cold. . . .



. . . and the joy of tobogganing.



I liked to keep my hand on a piano when it was being played. . . .



. . . or on a singer's throat.



But all the while, I wanted to speak. I could make sounds. . . .



I liked to feel the cat purr. . . .



I was determined to learn to speak.



At last Miss Sullivan went to see Miss Fuller of the Horace Mann School.

What you've heard is true—a deaf and blind girl in Norway has been taught to speak.

Then where do you think I should take Helen? Who can teach her?





Bring her to me,
Miss Sullivan—
I will teach her
myself.

Helen will be
overjoyed.

And so began my lessons with
Miss Fuller.



I copied the motion of her lips
and tongue.



Mm...mm...mm... Mm...mm
...mm...

At the end of an hour, I had
learned the sounds of six letters.



Mm—p—a—
sss—t—l.

How proud I was when I spoke
my first sentence!



I-it...is...
wa-warm.

...weeks and months of
practice...



Dictionary. D-dic-tion-ay-ary.

Not that I could be easily
understood. It took much
practice with Miss Sullivan...



...until I could really speak.

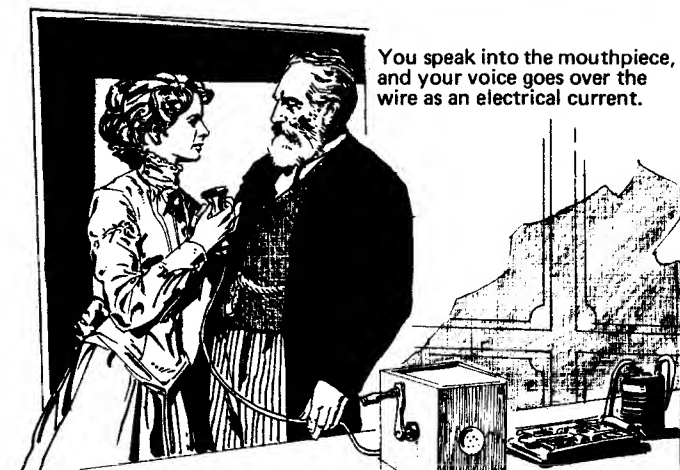


Do...you...have...your
...dictionary?

In 1893, I visited the World's Fair with Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. I was given permission to touch the exhibit.



Dr. Bell explained the telephone and other exhibits.



You speak into the mouthpiece, and your voice goes over the wire as an electrical current.

The next summer, I went to a school for the deaf in New York City.



Two years later, I entered the Cambridge School for Young Ladies, to prepare for college.



In class, Miss Sullivan spelled out to me what the teacher said.



The next king of England was Henry the Eighth.

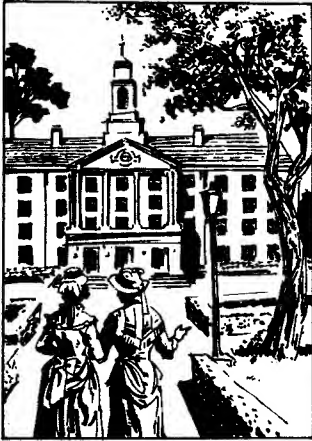
I learned to use a typewriter.



For the first time, I enjoyed the friendship of girls my own age.



In 1900, after some private study and many entrance examinations, I was admitted to Radcliffe College.



It has been a busy time for me. . . .



Caption to the Reader: Helen Keller wrote this story of her life while she was still in college. With the aid of Anne Sullivan, she went on to graduate and became world-famous. She was so famous that Presidents of the United States, from Grover Cleveland to John F. Kennedy, wanted to meet her. This remarkable woman, and her equally remarkable teacher, will always be remembered as an example of how human beings can overcome the greatest of handicaps.

